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Volume 4

# The Ambassador

Department of Education Teaching Ambassador Fellowship

## Ambassadors Expand Their Outreach



L-R: Eric Kinne, Krissy Walrath, Steven Hicks, Julie Shively all participated in a recent Teach For America Summit in Philadelphia, Pa.

Julie Shively (Ga)

The Teaching Ambassador Fellows used the winter months honing their leadership skills by learning more about key policy areas and policymakers, while continuing to speak with teachers about leadership and how they can and should become more involved in education policy at all levels.

With the confirmation of Education Secretary Arne Duncan and his expressed interest in listening to all stakeholders, the ambassadors sensed an immediacy to reach as many teachers as possible during

their fellowship, urging them to voice their opinions regarding the education section of the stimulus bill and the upcoming reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

In this newsletter you will read how the 25 fellows are extending their influence within their schools, districts, states, and across the country so that more teachers learn about national education policy and therefore feel that they can be, and indeed are, a part of the process to improve education for all children.

## Educators from Across the Country Discuss Teacher Leadership

Julie Shively (Ga.)

A combined effort on the part of classroom fellows Jeanine Gelhaus (Wis.), JoLisa Hoover (Texas), Tammie Schrader (Wash), Luther Sewell (Del), Amy Goodman (Ak.) and Jensi Kellogg-Andrus (SD) resulted in a virtual gathering of educators from across the country to discuss the attributes of teacher leaders, how to retain and encourage teacher leaders, and the differences among new teachers, second-stage teachers, and the experienced teacher.

The Great Lakes West Region Comprehensive Center and the Teacher Quality Content Center (both run by Learning Points Associates with support from the U.S. Department of Education) lent their research support as well as the technical support necessary to accomplish the webinar.

Panelists included the classroom fellows mentioned, as well as Terri Dozier, former Teacher in Residence at the U.S. Department of Education and current Director for the Center for Teacher Leadership at Virginia Commonwealth's Department of Education; and Maria Fenwick, a teacher from Boston, Mass. They prompted

the discussions, beginning with a background on the need for teachers to be leaders in the schools. Suggestions from panelists and callers to improve teacher leadership encompassed improved instructional practices, teacher retention, teacher advancement and professional growth, and ensuring continuity beyond the current school administration.

Four states – Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, and Georgia – have currently developed teacher leader certification or endorsement, while the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards is in the process of developing a certification for educator leadership.

Several educators weighed in on the subject of attributes of the teacher leader, suggesting that leaders are known for their influences, that they have the reputation of solving problems and bringing people together, that they strive to improve their practices, reflect, and actively seek to help others. All callers agreed that teacher leaders are committed to student achievement by knowing each student and using data to drive their instruction.

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## Webinar Sparked Lively Discussion

The discussion then turned to support for teacher leaders. Jeni reminded the group that rural communities often lack the resources and personnel needed to help teachers grow. These districts must become creative, consolidate resources, develop their own experts in teacher leaders specifically in their areas of need, and use distance learning opportunities if available.

All educators present agreed that cultivating the leadership capabilities in teachers helped to retain them in the profession. Several suggested that leadership needed to begin at the pre-service level, inculcating that culture beyond the typical cooperating teacher role by having pre-service teachers participate in leadership opportunities at their cooperating school. Once the teacher gained a classroom position, a meaningful induction program that includes mentoring is critical to helping the new teacher navigate through the tough first years.

At that point in the discussion, Maria Fenwick, a fifth-year, fourth-grade teacher from Boston stepped in to

talk about teacher needs in the three-to-five years. She reminded the older teachers that the Gen-Y teachers don't need to wait before they assume leadership roles, and that they are not as patient, but seek challenges, recognition and flexibility. If they cannot give their all to a profession that rewards them, they are more willing to walk away from the profession than those from former generations.

The last part of the webinar concentrated on practical suggestions for administrators. These included allowing all teachers, even the young ones, to take leadership risks, to cultivate the culture of inquiry and ability to think outside the classroom, and to develop an environment that fosters communication and collaboration, which will create a sense of ownership and accountability.

If you wish to view the archived webinar, please visit <http://www.learningpt.org/greatlakeswest/witq>

For more information about the National Center for Comprehensive Teacher Quality, visit <http://www.tqsource.org>

Cultivating leadership capabilities in teachers helped to retain them in the profession.

Webinar on Teacher Leadership

## Winter Reflections

Eric Kinne (Va.)

When considering the month of January, most would agree that the Inauguration on Jan. 20 was the single most important day of the month. While this may be true, Jan. 28 was also a big day in the Washington, D.C. region. For those of us who teach in Northern Virginia, just 15 minutes outside of the District, the clouds aligned to provide educators with a brief respite from the daily grind: a SNOW DAY! While most of my colleagues stayed home, I chose to brave the elements and venture downtown to visit the U.S. Department of Education. I spent the day with my policy liaison, Angela Hernandez-Marshall, in reviewing annual performance reports for Smaller Learning Community (SLC) grantees. Because of my interest in high school reform, I chose to research two schools that had used SLC funds to develop freshmen transition and "Schools-within-a-School" programs to meet the needs of their

students. My investigation was fascinating. I learned a lot about the grant process and the trials and tribulations that come with attempting to reform school systems from the ground up. Real-life accounts from key stakeholders and honest assessments of schools' progress made the reading riveting. Despite the fact that I was nestled away in a neighboring cubicle, Angela was extremely generous and answered my 1 million questions. Reviewing the reports gave me a new insight into my policy focus area, and I walked away with knowledge (and a list of contacts) to further enhance my experience as a fellow. I'm grateful that I'm close enough to the Department to visit one-on-one with my policy liaison, even if it does mean missing a snow day. Hopefully I'll have a similar opportunity in the near future!

For more information regarding Smaller Learning Communities, please visit <http://www.ed.gov/programs/slc/index.html>

## Art Best Practices Roundtable

Cheri Isgreen (Colo.)

As an art teacher, I care deeply that all students have the opportunity to learn through the arts. Art teachers must focus on what arts education uniquely develops in our students: the development of a child's humanity. Great civilizations are judged by their contributions to humanity, such as Mozart's "Piano Concertos," the Taj Mahal, Van Gogh's "Starry Night," the collected works of Shakespeare, and the Ballet Russe. The hallmark of a great society, whether ancient China, Renaissance Europe, or America in the 21st century, is the ability to dream and imagine; to pose questions and approach those questions from a multitude of perspectives; to create and communicate in a multitude of modalities; to inspire, synthesize, and evaluate; and to unite the creator and viewer in an empathetic understanding. These are the inherent skills that art education develops in our students.

To that end, I have worked closely with my liaison in the U.S. Department of Education, Doug Herbert, the Colorado Department of Education,

and Connie Stewart of the Center for Integrated Arts Education to design a Best Practices Roundtable Series. The Denver Art Museum will host arts educators along the Front Range of Colorado in early May, with Mesa State College in Grand Junction hosting an outreach session in late May. Opportunities to participate remotely via the Web are also available. Connie and I will moderate the sessions. We will work with Karol Gates of the CDE to formulate commonalities in order to share suggested recommendations with the U.S. Department of Education, place on the Colorado Department of Education Web site, align with a state standards review of arts education, and inform research design in arts education.

In preparation of the roundtables, I researched best practices in arts education and discovered that the literature fell into two main categories: Arts advocacy makes up the bulk as research shows arts education improves students as learners. The second group, arts curriculum, is connected to existing best practices in education in general. My questions are based on how arts educators can specifically maximize learning through specific art education practices. I believe this inquiry may be ground-breaking and has the potential to affect arts programs in states beyond Colorado.



Geovanni prepares clay for his poetry tile in Cheri Isgreen's art class

"I believe our inquiry is groundbreaking because schools, departments of education, and organizations are not yet asking these specific questions."  
Cheri Isgreen

## Empowering Teachers to Make Positive Change

Julie Shively (Ga.)

The New England Regional Teacher Leadership Initiative (NERTLI) is a dynamic and innovative forum for teachers to learn more about the education policy landscape and to identify opportunities for sustained involvement. This effort is being initiated by four current Classroom Teaching Ambassador Fellows, James Liou (Mass.), Steven Berbeco (Mass.), Anna Walker (Maine), and Jennifer Cloud (R.I.).



These fellows hope to encourage teacher leaders across New England to pool their classroom knowledge and experience, and then participate in shaping the education policies that affect teachers' work.

The goal of NERTLI is to shape a more powerful collective voice in education policy that builds upon their expertise in classroom to effect positive change at the local, district, state and federal levels.

To that end, the fellows developed a mini-conference to be held April 4. Teacher-leaders from around the New England region are invited to talk about education policy and why teachers should be involved in policy and leadership.

For more information about NERTLI and their first conference, go to <http://www.nertli.org/Welcome.html>

L-R: Steven Berbeco and James Liou, two founders of the New England Regional Teacher Leadership Initiative.

## Transitioning in the Transition

Jon Eckert (Tenn.)

This year has been an unbelievable learning experience for me, which recently ramped up significantly. On Jan. 29, I began working for Marshall "Mike" Smith and the secretary's team working on the stimulus bill. He is a senior advisor to the secretary. Smith was the deputy secretary for former Secretary of Education Riley, was a dean at Stanford, and seems to have limitless knowledge of education policy.

I am now working full time on the seventh floor (the same floor as the secretary and many political staff), learning, synthesizing, and writing about anything

Smith needs. Given the urgency of the stimulus package and the challenges of a new administration staffing up, there are tremendous opportunities to learn – a gift for any teacher. My experience in the Department has given me some knowledge of how things work, but more important in my current role is the knowledge I have gained of whom to ask when I do not know an answer – which is frequently.

All things considered, I am extremely excited about the work before us in our remaining time as fellows. This is an historic opportunity for the Department to make a difference in the lives of our kids, and we have the honor of playing a part.

## Roll Up Your Sleeves

Steven Hicks (Calif.)

Long-time career people at the U.S. Department of Education warned the Teaching Ambassador Fellows that transitions are pretty slow. The old administration winds down and the new one takes some time to get their feet wet. Don't bet on it! Before leaving her 7<sup>th</sup> floor office at the Department, former Secretary Margaret Spellings, who vowed to be the last woman standing, kept working right up to the last minute of the last hour of the last day. I even had a chance to interview her for my LA Times Blog (<http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2009/01/outgoing-secret.html>).

Seven days before her exit, Secretary Spellings put out the Dickens-inspired *Great Expectations*. In it, the history of American public education's evolution from a "privilege for a few to a necessity for all in America" is extolled, and the argument is made for how students once left behind are now leading the way. In the last breath of the former administration, this document challenges President Obama's administration to listen to the voices of the educators, civil rights' leaders, entre-preneurs, community leaders, and partners who have united behind high standards, raised expectations, and accountability for results. In short, it asks the new guy to keep *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) intact.

The "new guy," Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, has said that he and his team are going to examine what worked in NCLB and evaluate where things might need to be fixed. By the way, the other name for NCLB is the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Secretary Duncan even goes as far as to say that they may have to rename, repackage, and/or remarket it.

Uncharacteristically for a cabinet member, Secretary Duncan joined his wife and two young children in the cafeteria on his first day after the inauguration and greeted well-wishers while trying to munch through a green salad. The ambassadors had staked out a table on hearing the rumor of his imminent appearance. Upon seeing an opening, the five of us promptly approached him and told him about our hope for the

new administration: valuing the assets that Latino children bring to the education conversation (Bobbi Houtchens, Calif.); highlighting exceptional math teachers who can inspire students (Julie Shively, Ga.); improving recruitment and retention of the best and brightest teachers (Jon Eckert, Tenn.); growing and supporting teacher leaders to improve education for all students (Stephanie Canada, Okla.); and providing high-quality early childhood programs for all children (me). Secretary Duncan graciously listened to and reflected upon our ideas – a foreshadowing of the listening tour he will embark upon during his first six months. He thanked us for being at the Department and then returned to his salad.

In the meantime, first lady Michelle Obama made her first official visit on her federal agency junket to the U.S. Department of Education (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xr89KiF0MGU>). Clearly, education is a priority of our new first lady. As a product of public schools, she said she is committed to making sure that all kids have access to a first class education. She cautioned that the children are depending on us, and there is a lot to do. She asked us all to roll up our sleeves and get to work. Secretary Duncan says that "we have to work harder than we've ever worked; we have to work smarter than we've ever worked, we're going to have a lot of fun together, but we are not in this battle alone. Our goal is to unite the entire country behind this effort."

I have great expectations that we will do something extraordinary for our children. Each one of us plays a part. I'm ready. Are you?

"We have to work smarter than we've ever worked."  
Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan

## Distance Learning Research

Jensi Kellogg-Andrus (S.D.)

For the past few months I have been researching my policy question: "What components of a distance education program need to be developed and/or expanded to ensure equal access and successfully impact student achievement by promoting 21<sup>st</sup> century skills?" My research has led me to individuals and organizations that have positively implemented distance education programs or that have done extensive research in this area. I am now in the process of gathering information so I can highlight the

characteristics of a quality distance education program so that a district, organization, or even state education agency may replicate such a program.

My policy paper will begin with the purpose and benefits of offering distance education courses to students. I will then include needed technology hardware and conductivity, as well as suggested professional learning for teachers to become effective instructors in a distance education course. Lastly, I will describe what a grant program may look like if the federal government would support development of distance education programs.

## Career Clusters-Policy and Practice

Anne Claire Tejtal (Md.)

I've become a total advocate for career clusters. Most people with whom I speak have never heard of them before. In fact, I hadn't heard of them until I sat down with Scott Hess from the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) at lunch during the fellowship summer summit. I was taken in by the program itself, as well as by how impassioned Scott was.

Career clusters, in essence, combine together the expertise of professionals in the field, college professors, and high school teachers to create courses of study for high school students in 16 different clusters, or areas. These courses of study, in addition to providing all the standards for the students' core subjects, allow students to choose a career pathway that prepares them for college or another post-secondary experience. As a result of participating in career clusters, students become motivated, perform better in school, experience practical applications of otherwise abstract skills, are prepared for college and in less need of remediation, and often graduate with accreditation or college credit in their chosen field. Additionally, students participate in work-based programs, discovering the realities of working in their chosen field, and they

can switch into a different cluster if their current one is not for them. Besides all these attributes, I believe that career clusters offer a practical solution to high school dropout rates, student investment and choice, and college preparation. In the past few weeks, I've learned about every facet of career and technology education (CTE) and career clusters. I've learned the origin and purposes of the federal policies, the management and oversight of career clusters at the state level, the implementation at the local level, and the benefits and roadblocks at each step of the way. It's been a fascinating experience.

In addition to consistently communicating with Scott to learn about the clusters at the federal level, I've met with Lynne Gilli who oversees CTE for the Maryland State Department of Education, and Lisa Tarter who runs CTE for the city of Baltimore. Interestingly, although these folks all work at different levels of CTE, they share many of the same struggles and hopes. They spoke of their frustrations with the general public's misconceptions about CTE, and amazing, life-changing results they've seen from the programs. I truly believe that many of the answers to our high schools' problems lie in CTE and the clusters. More information can be found online at <http://www.careerclusters.org/>.

"I've learned about every facet of career and technology education and career clusters."  
Anne Claire Tejtal

## Information Regarding the Stimulus Package

Bobbi Ciriza Houtchens (Calif.)

I just returned from a visit to my school and district and lucked into a presentation that I wanted to pass on to everyone. I was fortunate to be there on the same night that a special board meeting was called, and even more fortunate that the "open forum," where citizens can speak to the board, had been moved to the 5:30 slot instead of following the official business of the board. I spoke for only about 8 minutes, recapping what I had been doing as a fellow and then sharing what is now on ED's Web page about the stimulus package, especially about one of the explicit goals - to keep teachers and college professors from being laid off. I was the only speaker and after I spoke the board excused itself to meet in closed session. I later learned they discussed and voted on laying off 275 teachers, the purpose for this special meeting. Board members let me know

the next day that they had not known any details about the stimulus package, and that my short presentation positively changed their conversation about teacher layoffs. The message they could now convey to teachers in my district was one of hope.

I urge you all to speak to your principals, superintendents, teachers, and school board members immediately about the stimulus money. Everything you need to know is at:

- [www.ED.gov](http://www.ED.gov)
- [www.Recovery.gov](http://www.Recovery.gov)
- <http://www.learningpt.org/recovery/>

This information is updated regularly.

Check it out and get busy! This is urgent and people in decision making positions and your fellow teachers need to be informed. This is a powerful action that we fellows must undertake right now!

"Speak to your principals, superintendents, teachers, and school board members immediately about the stimulus money. This is urgent and those in decision-making positions need to be informed!"

Bobbi Houtchens

## Mentoring New Teachers

Scott Sherman (Texas)

Recently, Thelma Leenhouts of the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement suggested that fellow classroom fellow JoLisa Hoover (Texas) and I conduct in-depth reviews of the goals and overriding intentions of the mentoring aspect of two "Transition to Teaching" program grantees in Texas.

In December, I interviewed project directors Gayle Grogdon and Carmen Garcia-Caceres of the University of Texas at Brownsville. Although their program is only one year old, they have created a new, sustainable, alternative certification model that includes communities of practice, a stronger mentoring component, and the use of

technology.

The university saw a lack of mentoring from the districts so they incorporated the mentoring concept heavily into their planning. Unfortunately, they concluded that mentoring is not a priority within the local school districts.

This program incorporates two different types of mentors. One position is called the "instructional Coach" who is viewed as a mentor in the traditional role. The second position is called the "instructional Advocate" who acts as a second mentor and provides additional support through various means of communication.

The program directors are very happy with what has evolved in this new program. They believe that is where teacher education programs are heading. In fact, the university is moving its traditional program toward this model.